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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the possibility of achieving democratic communities that are rational and caring, that make room for personal, unique voices, as well as a consensus of voices, that accord respect and equality, in essence, allow for diversity and celebrate differences. After laying the theoretical groundwork, the study examined this question through the concrete examples of family and classroom life. Family is the first form of community in which individuals participate, and so, is a logical choice for exploration of self-formation and selves in relation with others. School classrooms also are a logical choice, as they are the other most common community of which children are members. The central claim of the study was that the distinction between self and others may be too sharply drawn. There is hope for democratic communities, and for strengthening families, if people recognize how dependent the two notions are on each other. Strengthening communities and families means improving services, enhancing communication, and helping to meet individual and group needs such as clothing, shelter, employment, love, respect, and dignity. Relationships are vital to well being, and people exist in relationships that work for them, however marginally, or they do not exist. Problems in families and classrooms are due to overtaxation of their capabilities, and underappreciation of their worth by society. Community problems lie with political, social, and economic issues, not with families. There is a community only because of the family and other relationships in which individuals participate. (DK)

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Selves in Relation:

Reconstructing Community

by

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"Selves in Relation: Reconstructing Community"

INTRODUCTION

Bernstein describes for us the paradox of the modern age (in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 1983), that the coming into being of community already presupposes an experienced sense of community, and he demonstrates how Gadamer, Habermas, Arendt, and Rorty all fall prey to this problem, or one might rather say, all demonstrate this paradox in their philosophical work. (R. Berstein, p. 226) That we, as human beings, desire the types of dialogical communities where practical rationality can flourish is deeply rooted in human aspiration, and can be found expressed as far back as Aristotle and Plato. "Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty, and Arendt all help us see this and show how vital it is in understanding our own humanity and our solidarity with our fellow human beings." (R. Bernstein, p. 230) Is it possible for a form of community, or forms, to emerge which does justice to particularity and universality? When we live in a time where our situation, as Habermas describes it, is one in which "both revolutionary self-confidence and theoretical self-certainity are gone," (Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", p. 222) is there hope for achieving communities based on undistorted communication, dialogue, communal judgment, rational persuasion, and an ethic of care? One need not think long and hard to think of an example of a community that has been coopted and perverted - take Los Angeles, for example, after the Rodney King court case decision, and the results that decision had on the city of L. A. I want to use this paper as an opportunity to explore the possibility and hope of achieving democratic communities that are rational and caring, that make room for personal, unique voices as well as a consensus of voices, that accord respect and equality, in essence, allow for diversity and celebrate differences.

Once laying the theoretical groundwork, I'd like to explore this question through the concrete examples of family life and classroom life. Since our family (meaning the

main caretakers of the children) is our first form of community that we participate in, it is a logical choice for exploration of selves forming and in relation with others. School classrooms are also a logical choice, as they are the other most common community children are members of. Indeed, our children live in classrooms which have become like a second family for them. My central claim is that the distinction between self and others may be too sharply drawn. There is hope for democratic communities, and for strengthening families, if we recognize how dependent the two notions are, on each other. Strengthening our communities, and families, means improving services, enhancing communication, and helping to meet individual and group basic needs (i.e. clothing, shelter, the opportunity for employment, to be treated with love, respect, dignity ...) Certainly this topic is important, vital, to the wellbeing of classrooms, families, and communities at large.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There have been many philosophical views of the individual and how one relates to the community expressed through the years. The first written example of "social contract" theory that I am aware of can be found in Book Two of Plato's *Republic*, presented by Glaucon, and more modern versions can be found in Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and early Mills. Underlieing any social contract theory is the idea that individuals choose to join up with other individuals because it suits them to do so. It is to their advantage to give up some of their freedoms in order to have the security and aid to their own life that living with others will produce. Such a theory assumes individuals develop on their own, and as fully developed selves they agree, because it is rational or utilitarian to do so, to live together.

George Herbert Mead turned the whole notion of how the self develops upsidedown by arguing, I think successfully, that it is impossible for individuals to develop, and become as we know them, by themselves. Mead argued that we are social beings, first, and are members of a community first, and then, out of that

community we develop a sense of who we are as separate and autonomous individuals. One need only think of a newborn child's situation to realize a child's development, while in utero, is totally dependent on it's mother's well-being. If the mother is sick or doesn't get enough to eat, the baby inside of her suffers too. Each day in America we have children born who remind us of this fact, children who are born addicted to cocaine, or heroin, or born sick and undersized due to tobacco or alcohol their mothers ingested. Once a child is born, she is still totally dependent on someone else's care for survival. Someone must nurse him, or give him a bottle. Someone must keep her warm, and dry, protected from the elements. Someone must hold him and cuddle him, we know the need for touch, for loving embrace, is as important as food and rest. A newborn baby will not survive without another's care. (That the care must be human is a question. I am reminded of Victor, "the wild boy" discovered in France and educated by Itard. See Martin's *The Schoolhome* for a recent discussion of Victor.) The need to be cared for, and then to care for others, is embedded in this relational reality. (Noddings, Ruddick) Newborn babies come equiped with all sorts of talents and skills to help encourage their caretaker, and make their caretaker want to care for them, for it is a great commitment and a lot of work. They smell wonderful, and feel heavenly soft to the touch. They are so small and fragile, and they know how to cry out pitifully for assistance. They also are frequent sleepers, so the caretaker is able to rest. It is only days before they are able to smile, and a few more before they can coo and giggle, as they kick and squirm their way into one's heart.

Who takes care of the baby does not seem to really matter, as long as someone does. Whether there should be just one caretaker or many is also debatable. Whoever the caretaker is, or they are, will have a significant impact on the child. Much research has been successfully accomplished to support the idea that a baby does not begin with a sense of self. At first the baby is not able to distinguish between herself

and her environment. This is the concept of egocentrism as Piaget described it, uniquely a young child's, before he has learned that he is a separate being, not connected to his caretaker or his blanket or his bed. (Thayer-Bacon, 1989) Through day-to-day interactions with others a baby begins to learn about the culture she has been born into and about herself, by how others relate and react to her. How a child comes to know, i.e. learn language and how to express thoughts, is through these relationships the child is experiencing. I do not believe that we are each born with all knowledge already possessed by our souls, as Plato argued, or that we start as blank slates, as Locke argued. That each of us arrives with some genetic predispositions and are then also greatly affected by our environment is probably closer to the truth. What each of us knows is contextual and pertains to content, it is historical, psychological, political, and social. (Rorty, Kuhn)

Whereas the individualist, contract theory (classical liberalism) presented a view of the individual as developing on his own and then deciding to join up with other individuals to form a community, critical theorists (or socialists, e.g. Marx, Freire, Bentham, later Mills) have argued that the individual is completely dependent on the community and the community shapes the individual. This view of the relationship between the individual and community places all the action, the power and authority in the social group's hands, and views the individual as helplessly shaped by those external forces. Such forces are the setting the child is born into, such as economic conditions, political and social conditions (what gender, race, ethnicity, religion the child inherits), and how the culture views these factors.

Yet if we take another look at the newborn child being described above, and the child's relationship with the family, her first community, we find that the child affects the family as powerfully as the family affects the child. (I use the term, family, to define a group of people who care for each other and take care of each other, are responsible for each other's well being, especially settings where there are mixed ages, for

example a baby and an adult person. A family need not be connected by blood or be of different gender. A sense of care, concern, and connection, Jane Roland Martin's "3 C's" (*The Schoolhome*, 1992), is what helps bind a family together.) The picture painted above pointed out how dependent the child is on others for care, as Dewey points out in *Democracy and Education*, children are physically helpless. But they are socially strong. A baby developing in utero can cause a mother to change her eating habits and exercising habits, so that her baby will be born healthy and strong. The baby will enter into her plans and her relationship with others, as she tries to prepare for its arrival. She may cement a relationship or terminate one, in preparation, so that a good support system will be there to help her when the baby arrives. She will definately have to make changes in her work schedule, even if only temporarily, because there will come a time when she won't be able to work at all. If she is not planning to be the child's main caretaker, she will have to make plans for who will be. Financially her life will be affected due to the child, before the child is even born.

After birth, there are even more changes that happen to the family, because of a child's presence. Basic human patterns of living such as when one eats or sleeps or bathes and dresses change due to one small physically helpless human being! Much stress, learning and growth, and tremendous feelings of love develop, because of this small living being, who really isn't an individual with a sense of self yet. But even that doesn't take too long. At two a child can very adaquately express his needs and desires verbally, and a basic personality has already begun to show itself. Even at one year, one child will react to a situation by crying and another will react to the same situation by laughing. One will be shy and timid around strangers, another will reach out for them and give them a hug, or at least a smile, a third will scream if they come near! Parents with several children can tell about how differently their children reacted to the same environment in their house, as well as the same guidelines and rules for coexistence.

My point is that the model of the classical theorists (socialists) makes the opposite mistake of the classical liberalists, in its view of the individual and community. Where the classical liberal gives the individual the all powerful role of affecting the community, the critical theorist tendency is to give the community the all powerful role of affecting the individual. The reality is that it is an interactive, interrelational process. (Dewey, 1916) Dynamic changes take place with the self and the community, due to their interaction with each other, and all are affected. The community, e.g. family, teaches the child her language and social customs, she eats what others eat, sleeps when others sleep (hopefully!), plays with whatever toys her family gives her, and socializes when others are available to interact with her, in ways they teach her are acceptable. The child develops a sense of self, a voice, and then turns around and contributes that voice to the conversation. He adds his insight and unique perspective as well as his actions and energy to the community. And the community is changed because of him.

I asked at the beginning of this paper if it is possible for a form of community to emerge which does justice to particularity and universality. Is there a form of community that recognizes the interactive, interrelational, interdependent qualities of individuality and community, as described above? Such a form can be found in Dewey's description of a democratic community. His description highlights the type of community that would actually encourage the contributions of unique individual voices to the conversation. It also recognizes the interaction and relationship between the individual and the group. The two criteria he gives in *Democracy and Education* to measure the worth of a form of social life are: "the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups." (p. 99) The first criteria points out the importance of connection and relationships within the group, and the second points out the importance of interaction within the group and with others outside of the group. A

democratic society is: "A society which makes provisions for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life." (p. 115) A democratic community is dependent on the contributions of its individuals, as well as on the recognition of each one's value and worth. Because each voice is needed, and acknowledged as being needed, the opportunity for dialogue, for conversation that is undistorted and relies on rational persuasion is vital. Also, because of the relational quality of the people in the community, an ethic that relies on caring about each other, showing concern for each other's wellbeing, and getting to know each other, as I's and we's, not treating people as they's, is vital.

That we presuppose a sense of community in our discussions of community only makes sense, because it is where we come from, and how we develop a sense of our selves; it's our context, and we can't get out of it. Given the accuracy of the above description of the relationship between individual selves and communities one should begin to see that this dynamic interactive process is interdependent. Much attention is placed on the child's dependency on the family, or the individual's dependency on the community, but the community is also dependent on the individual for it's survival. Without individual selves able to contribute to a community, there isn't one. Without children, there isn't a family. (There may be a marriage, a couple, but not a family.) And without families, taking care of and raising children to be healthy, contributing adults, there won't be a larger community, such as a neighborhood, a city, or a nation. Given the codependency that exists between individuals and communities, families and the larger communities that they live in, it makes sense that families need to be cared for by our larger communities, so that they are able to do their job of caring for their children, and raising healthy individuals who will be able to contribute to the community. Yet that doesn't seem to be the direction much rhetoric and advise has

taken, in America, especially during this past year of campaign speeches and debates. Let us look further.

FAMILIES

As we have seen, families, caretakers, are the first relationships we experience, and it is through these relationships that we survive until we are strong enough and capable enough to take care of ourselves. By then, we have expanded and extended our relationships with others, and become active, participating members of other communities, but always our family is our bedrock. Our family is our first community. We hopefully learn how to communicate, speak and be heard, develop language skills, as well as learn how to relate to others within this first community, our family. Our family teaches us more in the first five years of our lives than we learn the rest of our lives, and most of these lessons are ones that help us be able to grow up and be successful members of society, our larger community. Schools, particularly classrooms containing students and teachers, are another strong source of knowledge and experiences concerning relationships and communities. For many children today, they rank as second in importance, right after families.

Families and schools are often targeted as the source of community problems. We hear many people, it is the general political stand of the Republican Party, as expressed by politicians such as Dan Quayle, and Ronald Reagan, blame the disintegration of families for rioting, crimes, and general meyham and problems that exist, especially in our cities. In my fair state the governor is blaming higher education for the problem in schools (lousy teachers) and the teachers are blaming the parents. While it is true that if our families aren't doing their job, our communities will suffer, it is also true that if our communities aren't helping and supporting our families, our families suffer. As we saw, the two, families and communities, are interrelated, for they both are made up of people, the same people, in relationships. While some have begun to argue that schools need to take up the slack and do the nurturing of children

that families are no longer doing, I am arguing that we, as a community, a nation, need to do what we can to support our families, for without them, we are in deep trouble. I wish to encourage schools, in their role as second communities for children, to help further the caring, relational skills children need to develop so that they can grow up to be healthy citizens able to contribute to a democractic community, one which is rational and caring.

Recently I read a wonderful, insightful book by Jane Roland Martin titled *The Schoolhome* (1992). [She is being honored here at AERA by Division B for her contributions to curriculum.] In this book, Martin argues that schools need to be more caring, concerned, connected places (what she lables "the 3 C's"), which I couldn't agree with more. She argues that schools need to be this way because children are NOT receiving the nurturing that they use to receive at home. The family, our silent partner with schools, has traditionally done a tremendous amount of educating, helping prepare children to be members of society. Martin argues that the family has gone through major changes recently, and whereas before there was a parent at home taking care of the children, now there are none. She does not blame women for going to work, it is women and men who have gone to work, but she is concerned about the children who are being left behind, the education they are missing as a result of it, and the ways schools may be able to help, by increasing their focus on parenting type activities and creating a school that is more like home.

While I greatly applaude Martin's efforts to make schools more loving, warm, caring places, I want to turn our attention back to families and what their current situation is. Given the importance of the family's task, in helping to encourage the development of children who will grow up to be healthy, contributing members to a community, I don't think we can expect schools to take their place, nor will schools ever be able to be successful at such a task. Schools tend to the needs of large groups of people, even small private schools have more children in a classroom than

one usually finds in a family. Families tend to children on a more individual basis. The kind of attention a child can possibly receive at home, or a sitter's home, is not likely to be found in a school setting, or, for that matter, in many daycare settings. What I wish to argue here is that there are many things we can do, as a community, to help support our families, and doing so is in the best interest of the communities, for if families fall apart, so will communities. Just as I described above the babies situation in relation to her family, and how the two affect each other, I's like to now describe what families lives are like, and how they affect the community.

A family is made up of people who have basic needs that need to be met in order to survive. We are seeing today all the ways that families can be stretched to the breaking point when their needs aren't met. For example, the need for shelter. Many families, even with a traditional father and mother and their children, are living in America right now without homes. (Atlanta, and the Carter's support for Habitats for Humanity is a striking example.) Without a space to call one's own, how does a family hold itself together? Concerns such as: where will we sleep tonight, who will be sleeping next to us, what kind of noises will I hear tonight, and will we be sleeping in a safe place? take all of their energy. They worry: will I be able to get a shower and clean my clothes, how can I look presentable for a job interview, or help my child get to school, how will I fix a meal, will we ever have anything we can call our own? A homeless family doesn't have the luxury of being concerned about nurturance and relational skills, though I'm sure they worry about those and feel the stress of not being able to provide for those needs, but their energy must go toward sheer survival first. The problem is that without being able to address needs of caring and connection, the family will likely fall apart. This example assumes a family that is together, what about the even greater number of families in America who are not made up of parents, but are instead single parent homes? In these settings it is guaranteed that the child is growing up with a parent who is often not around, even if the single parent has a job

and a place and is able to provide for the child's basic needs of food and clothing, etc. With just one adult in a family, great stress is again placed on the family to be able to meet needs of caring and nurturance, and relating. Basic survival must come first, and having fun, laughing together, cuddling with each other, listening to each other and helping each other solve their problems comes at the end of a long work day, after children are picked up from babysitters, only to find a backup sitter is needed tomorrow because the sitter is sick, and the baby needs medicine because now she is getting sick too, and groceries need to be purchased so the meal can be cooked, and clothes need to be washed so there's something to wear tomorrow, and the car is making a funny whining sound. Youth who join gangs often say the gang makes them feel important and safe, they find a sense of care, and concern there. Gangs are fulfuilling the need for a family for many of our youth, and they are turning around and having an affect on our communities.

While it is true that families are suffering a lot right now, this suffering isn't new. Families have struggled throughout time to build and maintain their familial community, and create a place where individuality can develop as well as social, communal skills. I would like to point out, though, that how a family emphasizes individuality vs community has varied throughout time, and across different cultures. How a community has viewed their families has also varied. Many Native American cultures, as well as Eastern cultures, have traditionally emphasized the importance of harmony in the family, and community, over the importance of individual rights and development, whereas western cultures such as America have emphasized the rights and needs of the individual over the needs of the community. Some cultures view it a reflection on the health of the community to have any of its members suffering, and so they share, accomodate, and help each other, taking care of their families, so the families can take care of their children, so that the community as a whole will be

healthy and survive. No family is viewed as expendable, all are viewed as vital to the wellbeing of the community, and the survival of all.

What is new about the suffering of families in America, is we are maybe finally getting concerned about it. We are maybe finally seeing that if we don't help families take care of their young, the young will grow up with guns in their hands and a lot of hatred in their hearts. As a professional woman with four children, dealing with such problems as Martin describes in *The Schoolhome*, and feeling tired and worried, at times, I think of my poorer sisters and don't feel guilty about how I have had to care for my young, but instead, angry. Black women have been leaving their children to work long hours in white homes, since they were forcefully dragged to America's soil. Women of color are forced to be domestic help for wealthier families around the world. And single women, as I was, have had to leave their children to work and keep them alive, even before the recent deluge of divorces. Why haven't we gotten concerned about the children in America much sooner? Were the children in the past who suffered from less than ideal caring situations too few in number to worry about, or did we think they were expendable? It is embarrassing, as well as immoral, to live in such a wealthy nation where so many children suffer. Are we that greedy and coldhearted? I believe this topic is timely now because so many children are for the first time in the same situation as our poorer children and the lack of care is affecting most of us for the first time. It is finally taking a toll on most children in the nation.

Rich families in America don't have the problems described here because they have always been able to afford to hire someone else to come to *their* home, or they have sent their children to boarding schools. [One is reminded of Zoe Baird's situation.] Lack of adequate childcare doesn't affect their children, though it may finally begin to affect their lives in other ways. A recent article in my local paper is titled "Businesses are learning that a happy home means a happy employee." (*Monitor*, Bowling Green State University, Jan. 25, 1993) Maybe the wealthier people in

America are becoming concerned because it is costing them money? What we need to acknowledge is that every single child is a treasure we cannot afford to squander or hurt. Every child has something to give to this world, and deserves to be cared for.

What we are facing in America, right now, in urban centers such as Los Angeles and Atlanta, is a direct result of our orientation in the issue of how an individual relates to one's community. I have suggested that the self develops out of a community, the family, and then, once developing a sense of self, turns around and contributes that self to the community. To think that a self develops independently of the community, as the classical liberal poistion suggests, means the community need not worry about how an individual develops. The individual will develop, on his own, and then join the community or not, if he desires. If he does not desire, that may affect the community, but how he develops is really not their concern. That would be invading an individual's right to privacy and intruding on his freedom. How an individual turns out is up to him. To think that the community is all powerful and determines how an individual develops, as the critical theorist suggests, means that as long as the community is encouraging the "right" develop of the individual, the community will continue to thrive and survive. The group's needs become greater than the individual's. How the group is doing is what is important, even if it means many must live with less, so that all can have some. To think that the community is dependent on individuals for its survival and that the individuals are dependent on the community for survival, as the democratic model suggests, means all must help and work together, all are important contributing members whose needs must be met so that the needs of the community can be met. The community must care for the individuals so the individuals can grow up to care for the community.

CLASSROOMS/SCHOOLS

What does this mean when we move the setting from the home to the schools? Let's take a look now at classrooms and the kind of community that develops within

them. Traditionally, our classrooms have been designed to help each individual child learn, and receive the knowledge the state deemed necessary for the child to be able to grow up and be a good citizen to the country. A good teacher has been someone who could control her class, keep her students quiet and in line, and get as many students as possible to pass the tests and move on to the next grade. There has been much discussion of the factory model of education (see Sizer or Spring), but what about the view of the individual in the classroom, or the classroom as a community? The model that has been traditionally used is the classical liberal view, focusing on students as individuals. Students work by themselves at their own desks, not allowed to talk to each other or help each other (that's cheating). What happens in the classroom is a parent's concern, only in terms of how it affects their child. For example: "is my child in the highest reading or math group, will my child get behind in his studies if special education children are brought into his classroom?" The teacher has been viewed as the model of authority and wisdom, who doesn't seem to have a life outside of the classroom, or at least it's not acknowledged. This is the case for the children as well. Their life outside of the classroom is not usually the school's concern. This is certainly NOT a model that encourages the development of a community within the classroom. It does not seem to encourage contributions by each other for the benefit of the group, or the expression of concern for each other's well being.

We have seen new models for classrooms developing more recently, one's that don't treat children as just separate individuals. Models, such as cooperative learning or Martin's schoolhome, encourage students to work together and help each other. The students are graded on their group effort, not just their individual work. Rather than walking into a classroom where each student is working silently at their desk, one is likely to walk into a room where children are grouped together, working at tables, and there is a hum about the room, as the students talk to each other and help each other solve their problems. Rather than standing in the front of the room lecturing, the

teacher is likely to be moving around the room listening to, or participating in small group discussions, or leading a lesson with a small group in a corner of the room, while the other students work on other activities. These kinds of models for learning recognize that a classroom is not just a collection of separate, autonomous individuals, but a classroom has the possibility of being a community. It can be a nurturing, caring, concerned place, just like home. And the students and teachers can function like a larger family.

Deciding to set up one's classroom like a democratic community means one is going to focus on interaction and the free exchange of ideas, and encourage the development of communication skills, as well as relational skills. It means that one is going to recognize that each voice in the room is important and must have the opportunity to be heard. A democratic classroom is one which must be flexible, able to adjust to the needs of its population. Children arrive at school hungry, or tired, or sick. They need tending to, before they can learn. They need to be able to go to a place, their classroom in their school, that will notice how they are doing, and be a haven they can turn to for support and help, if they need it. Our children walk past wino's and druggies on the way to school. They hear gunfire and see violence and crime all around them. They need to know people are looking out for them, and care about them, and will help them, if they need it. And families need to know schools are a source of potential assistance and concern, full of people who care about them and their children. Schools are children's second opportunity to experience "associated living" (Dewey's term), just as families are their first opportunity.

Even if a child arrives at school with all his basic needs met, having come from a loving home that has nurtured him and helped him grow healthy and strong, he needs to arrive to a school that teaches him the importance of looking out for each other, and helping others. If there are children in a classroom suffering, usually everyone suffers, as a result. Little learning can take place if children are hurting each

other, or disrupting the environment. The classroom is dependent on the individual's well being, to function best, and the individuals are dependent on the group's well being to function best. Again, there is a relationship here, there is interaction, there is interconnection, there is interdependency. Realizing this is the first step toward working to help build healthy democratic communities in our classrooms, full of loving, caring, reasonable people who help each other and teach and learn from each other. There is hope for achieving communities based on undistorted communication, dialogue, communal judgment, rational persuasion, and an ethic of care, if we can begin to see how dependent communities are on the wellfare of their individuals, and how dependent individuals are on the community, for their wellfare.

SUGGESTIONS

If we begin to recognize how vitally important families are to the life of communities, and that each member of each family is a member of our larger family of fellow Americans, (which are all members of our larger family of human beings, which are all members of our larger family of all living beings...) we can begin to think about what we can do, as educators in classrooms, and as citizens in a democratic community, to help our family members. First and foremost, each child needs to have his or her basic needs met. Food, shelter, clothing, safety, and a kind, loving touch, are essential for survival. Each child needs a family she can count on to take care of her. Families need support and help from their larger family, their communities. How can a family adequately care for a child when they have no work to make money to buy food, or no land to grow food on, or no place to safely care for their child? How can they care for a child when they are sick or beaten and uncared for themselves?

We live in times that are hard on families, though certainly these times are not unique in this quality. But the kind of hardness is maybe unique. What strikes me as so unique about our times is, not that there are problems like gangs or drugs, or overpopulation, lack of employment, or lack of good health care. What's unique is the

way we have gotten so good at divorcing ourselves from each other, and objectifying other human beings; we don't seem to realize how interconnected we all are, we've forgotten how dependent we are on relationships for our knowledge and our survival; we have successfully severed our hearts from our minds. We have successfully objectified other life forces, so we can master them, and are now having to live with the results of our efforts, a world and people that don't make sense and don't respond to reason. A world that is dangerous and destructive, and is on the verge on being unable to sustain life. That may sound like a grim description to most people in my town of Bowling Green, Ohio, (though certainly not all) but it is reality for many families and their communities, such as L. A., where my brother lives, and Chicago, where my daughter lives, and Atlanta, where my former next-door neighbor lives. We have got to acknowledge that people need our care and concern, by realizing that we are all connected to each other. We have got to open our arms and embrace each other, and start the hard work of easing pain and suffering, healing anger and hatred, by treating each other as vital members of our community, so that we won't see more videotapes of police beating people, or people beating each other and setting their homes on fire.

Communities are dependent on families in order to survive, and families are dependent on communities. Relationships are our bedrock we build upon. Without them, no one has the chance of a good life. Let's do all we can to nourish them and help them grow healthy and strong. [I intended to make suggestions here, but instead would like to leave that up to the community of scholars attending this session.] I am sure everyone here could contribute suggestions, as well as think of ways to actively help ease the problems we all face. I hope you will offer your ideas and comments when the opportunity arrises.

CONCLUSION

This paper took as its topic selves in relation, and the reconstruction of community. It recognized a longstanding interest in dialogical communities where

practical rationality can flourish, but wished to add heart and feelings to the concept of community, through such notions as caring, concern, and connection. It acknowledged the real question of a sense of community emerging which does justice to particularity and universality, and suggested that the distinction between self and others may be too sharply drawn.

My argument is that relationships are vital to the well-being of people, people exist in relationships that work for them, however marginally, or they don't exist. Relationships are so vital that we know what we know because of them, and we care about others because of them. Families, in whatever form we are finding them today, with whomever are the main caretakers of our children, are as strong as they can be. They have to be strong, to deal with the diversity of problems they face today. That families struggle, and classrooms suffer, is due to overtaxation of their capabilities, and underappreciation of their worth, by society. Our community problems lie with political, social, and economic issues, not with our families. That we have any kind of community at all is due to the family and other relationships we participate in. To expect caretakers, or teachers, alone, to solve society's problems is an impossiblity. Recognizing the importance of relationships, and doing things to help nurture and enhance them, will help families, and other educators, raise people who are more caring and better thinkers. These people will then be better equiped to help us realize the hope of democratic communities, based on undistorted communication, dialogue, communal judgment, rational persuasion, and an ethic of care. Democratic communities will hopefully be able to help solve society's problems.

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